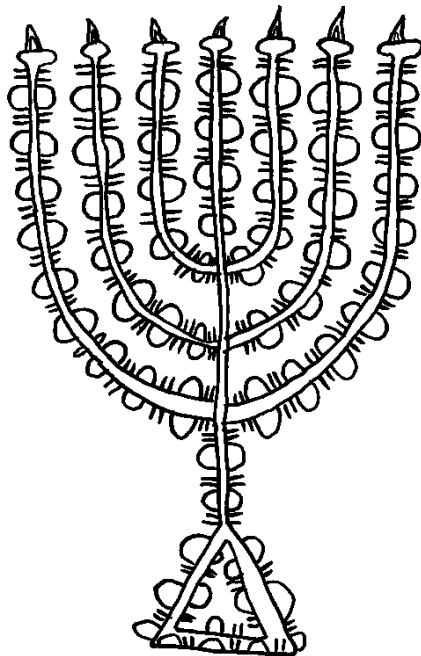


The Principles of Hearing the Holy Spirit and Walking the Christian Way in the New Covenant.



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. - Psalm 119:105

I will not leave you as orphans John 14:18

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Preface:

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This is part of a larger work on relating to the Lord. Other parts will be forthcoming as they are completed. This initial section is published in the hope that it will help believers relate to the Lord.

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PART 1 - PREPARATION

This manual is an exploration of the topic of how we can hear God's voice and takes a Christian approach to this issue. It aims to bridge the gap between Jesus teaching about who God is and how we as disciples and believers in Jesus can relate to God and follow him in our lives. It is hoped it will help others to find and relate to the Saviour and help us to overcome the darkness and walk in the light.

I have sought the Holy Spirit to help guide me in this undertaking and endeavoured to practice what I preach in writing it. This should not give the reader the impression that it means I always succeed in following its ideals, but it stands to inspire me and to encourage me in regard to my own convictions towards these things.

The purpose of this manual is to help believers relate to the Holy Spirit, to help support the basis on which believers can pray and hear from God and develop a relationship with him. It also has as its aim to help believers find their ministry and purpose in God's will. In short, to develop a real relationship with our risen Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It is also to establish a basis for new covenant Christian communications with God and the responsibility, accountability and discernment required to accompany this. So it will propose a model for communicating with God that aspires to these things.

What is proposed is an experimental approach to this undertaking that involves the observation and collection of evidences as part of the process for learning to communicate with God and validating our relationship with him (Psalm 34:8). This is in response to questions like "How do I know if I am really communicating with Jesus as the God of the Bible?" or "How can I tell what is genuinely from him and verify and validate it?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)

If we are serious in developing our relationship with God and proving it along the way. Our intent is not putting God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16) (Matthew 4:7) but rather putting ourselves to the test (2 Corinthians 13:5) under him as we seek to know him (Philippians 3:10). As the scripture reference above says, our motivation is to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8) in a spirit of inquiry like the Jews of Berea in the book of Acts (Acts 17:11).

This follows on from holding the understanding of Hebrews 11:6. We start from the assumption of faith which is that God exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him. We then record, collect and validate our evidences of our communications with him along the way. Validation takes place by explaining and articulating our experiences and providing our reasons as to why we think what we get is from him (1 Peter 3:15). These may be subjective evidences, though we may also accumulate objective evidences as well.

While it may be impossible to “prove” some aspects of this undertaking the general principles of an empirical research approach are aspired to. This involves providing evidence for assertions that are made that may be verified and confirmed or disconfirmed. Because of the key premise stated above, a context for interpretation is adopted by the believer.

Critical to this undertaking is a bold acceptance of the things of God through faith and a positive expectation that God will guide us and show us the way (Psalm 38:2). The reason for adopting this strategy is because without faith you cannot please God and you cannot know him (Hebrews 11:6). You cannot find the God of the Bible through unbelieving science or mere logical pursuit. This teaching is not an attempt to prove that God exists but rather to facilitate the Christian to pursue a relationship with the living God of the Bible and maintain accountability and credibility.

Preconditions for this undertaking:

The preconditions for the relationship with God outlined in this document are the salvation that occurs when we are introduced to God by asking Jesus to come into our lives by his Holy Spirit (Revelation 3:20), asking for the forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:9), that is, confessing our sins to him, receiving the forgiveness of our sins and being born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). We also need to accept him as our Lord and God and follow him (Matthew 16:24).

If you would like to know Jesus, who is the God of the Bible, he is here with you now (Revelation 3:20). What you need to do initially is to introduce yourself to him, acknowledge who he is, ask him to forgive your sins, come into your life by his Holy Spirit and to cause you to be born again from above (John 3:3). You then need to commit yourself to following him as his disciple (Mark 10:20-22). Being a disciple is being in a relationship where he is your teacher and guide in the life on this earth that he has called you to. To communicate with God, we need to pray. Prayer is just talking to God.

Here is a prayer you can pray to ask Jesus to come into your life by his Holy Spirit:

Jesus, I thank you that you are God, and right now I ask you to forgive my sins through your death on the cross and to come into my life by your Holy Spirit and cause me to be born again from above. I commit myself to following you from now on as my Lord and master with your help and by your grace. Please show me your ways and show me who you are and how to follow you.

Beyond this he calls you to receive Baptism in water as a symbol of your passing from death to life and identifying with Jesus who was baptised in water. Along with this you need to seek the Lord for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit gives utterance and empowerment for service and life in the Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16. Acts 10:47). Here are words you can use to ask him to baptise you with his Holy Spirit:

Jesus, I ask you to please baptise me in the Holy Spirit just as you did to those Christians who received your baptism in the book of Acts with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues as your Holy Spirit gives me the words to say and the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. Empower me with your supernatural anointing of power to serve you in my life and help me to walk by your Holy Spirit.

You then need to continue to seek him and ask him to baptise you with the Holy Spirit until you have the evidence of having received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit gives you the words to say (Acts 19:2).

Receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues has been somewhat downplayed in recent times in many “Pentecostal” churches, yet this should not be the case, and that it is, is a real work of the evil one. It is important to be zealous and genuine for God and not half hearted. Part of Jesus message and his good news is that God wants us to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and to receive and use the gifts he has given us including speaking in other tongues. Keep seeking the Baptism in the Holy Spirit until you experience the power of God and the ability to speak in other tongues as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Pentecostal people should be those like Christian Olympians who bear and carry the torch of the Holy Spirit, championing his values to others. We should as Pentecostal people be evangelistic about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, encouraging others to seek the Lord that he would baptise them with his power from above and that they receive the gift of Tongues, speaking as the Holy Spirit gives them the words to say. You know you have the Baptism in the Holy Spirit when you have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and the ability to speak in tongues. As you grow in Christ and submit to him you should see the fruit of the Holy Spirit displayed in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).

A real relationship with Jesus is a direct relationship with the Jesus of the Bible, where we are able to speak to and hear from him through the Holy Spirit in prayer (John 10:27) as well as through scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). It should not just be that our prayer time is about a ritual or routine of reciting scripture like the Lord's Prayer, or asking God for things, or even giving thanks for things we have received, though these are all important parts of our prayer life. Prayer should actually be an encounter and a dialogue that is characterised by our hearing from God even more than our speaking to him. How to get to this place is the most important objective of this teaching.

So, how does God speak to us and how can we hear him?

How does God speak to people? How does God communicate with us? In the Bible we hear of Moses who is said to have talked with God face to face and experienced the voice of God in an explicit way, like someone speaks face to face with a friend (Exodus 33:7). So, why don't we hear the voice of God like this? Or, why don't we experience a burning bush type experience like Moses did? Something supernatural where we know without a doubt that it is God's voice.

In the way of other examples from the Bible, the prophet Samuel seems to have had an individual experience of the voice of God, that is, only he could hear him, whereas Eli recognised that it was God calling Samuel through Samuel's report, though he could not hear the voice himself (1 Samuel 3:4).

Also in the Bible we read that the priests had the Urim and Thummim which could be used to reliably determine God's will in a situation. This seems really attractive to us as they could just use this tool to know what God's will was in a situation. No lack of certainty, no guessing.

At Jesus baptism however it is implied that everyone present could hear the voice of God that supernaturally came forth. Its form was an audible voice as if it projected from a loudspeaker. I am going to introduce a word at this point and that word is "manifestation". Manifestation here refers to how something is known, and how it is shown. It is a bit of a theological term, but having described its meaning, I hope readers will be able to follow its use in this teaching. What are the types of manifestation when it comes to the voice of God?

What happens when everyone can hear the voice of God?

At Jesus' baptism there was a general and explicit manifestation of the voice of God that could be heard by all who were in the immediate vicinity that said "This is my beloved son, with him I am well pleased". Or, at the transfiguration (John 17:5) where the disciples were present as well as the Lord and heard the voice from the cloud (2 Peter 1:18) (Luke 9:35).

We could describe Samuel's experience as an individual manifestation of the voice of God as only he could hear it. So we have the explicit but internal or individual manifestation of God's voice to Samuel and the general explicit manifestation of God's voice at Jesus baptism, which is, those standing by could hear the voice of God saying this too.

Then it seems we have subtler and internal forms of communication of the Lord with us. In Elijah we get the idea that God's voice being expected by Elijah or at least by the narrator of the Book of Kings to be found in different natural phenomenon, but instead of being booming and accompanying overt natural phenomenon like an earthquake or strong wind it was like a whisper, whether general or individual that he heard (1 Kings 19:11-13).

There is another interesting passage in the Old Testament where God rebukes Aaron and Miriam where he says that he reveals himself to people in dreams and visions, but in a very special and supernatural way to Moses (Numbers 12:2) Again, all 3 heard the voice of the Lord, so it was a general manifestation of God's voice. God talks to Moses explicitly and not in a mysterious way or in a way where you need to work out what the message is because it isn't clear.

God says, if there is a prophet that he makes himself known in a vision or a dream (Numbers 12:6). Should we then propose that if we have had no such experience that we have never heard from the Lord and indeed cannot until we have such experiences and that God only talks to us through such experiences? How do we recognise or how are we meant to recognise or know when it is God speaking to us?

Certainly, if someone does have such experiences, claiming a dream or vision, it could lend an authority to their claims to have heard from God. God speaking in a vision or a dream is a stronger form of communications from God, but it is not the only one. God can speak to us in dreams and visions but this may not be our usual experience.

God speaking to us through our thoughts.

It is also apparent that the living God will also speak into the thoughts of human beings and particular his own children, that is, Christians through the Holy Spirit (John 10:27 1John 2:27). It is really important to clarify this to the whole Christian world, therefore hear the word of the Lord:

I am the true God; the Living God of Israel says the Lord. I speak into the thoughts of man as I will. How much more also into the thoughts of my children that they may follow me. Did I not say by Isaiah my prophet that when my people come to me they will hear my voice telling them the way in which they should walk? Come to me and recognise me my people. By my Spirit did I not say that I would lead and teach you. I have earnestly desired that you should know my ways and walk in my paths. Follow not the paths of deceitful men who say that I cannot be known. I am raised from the dead, I am alive for evermore. Seek to know me, my people. Know that I am with you and listen to the voice of my Spirit.

This is a really important assertion and it is right; otherwise we might fall into the error that God never speaks to us individually, or such errors as the cessationist heresy. The passage referred to in the prophecy above is Isaiah 30:21. It is fitting that prophets should rise up and boldly prophecy this. See that it pleases the Lord that this is the case.

We would indeed have need that someone should teach us if the Holy Spirit does not show us his teaching or words to say, or if his direct word was only for some bygone period. It is amazing that Christians have not focussed on this area of communications with their saviour. It is important we get and share Jesus' vision of the life he wanted us to have when he departed to be with the Father and sent his Holy Spirit for us to know him. This is a faith issue (Luke 18:8). If the cessationists are right, you do have need that someone should teach you. Otherwise, how are you to understand or know? No, if they are right you have indeed been left as an orphan. Who is right, the cessationists or the Holy Spirit speaking through John (1 John 2:27)? Their other gospel be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

So, more than ever, there is a need to both assert that God can speak directly into our minds by the Holy Spirit and that we can learn to hear him. That he is alive and not buried in the pages of a book where he can't be heard or at best only remotely, and there is actually a means and way through which we might know him directly here, now and today. Otherwise Jesus statements that it was better that he goes away are nonsense and ridiculous (John 16:7). If we do not know how to hear the Holy Spirit, we may as well be orphans.

The reason we do not recognise it when God speaks to us can be not only our dismissiveness of a thought "oh, that was just me or my brain, some silly thought". Or that our minds are so clouded with sin that we don't notice the Holy Spirit speaking to us. As Elihu in the Book of Job says "For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it." (Job 33:14)

Why is it so easy to miss God speaking to us? Why has there never been a teaching on how we can hear from God this way? Could it be that we miss hearing from God because we are not listening to him? If you are bothering to look for Jesus to speak to you by the Holy Spirit, you are doing well. If you want Jesus to speak to you this way and seeking for him to show you, you are doing even better.

Lord Jesus, I presume you are speaking to me. Help me not to miss it. Help me to perceive it and with wisdom to understand what you are saying to me. Please grant me your grace to hear your voice and to follow you as you desire.

So having read about these experiences in the Bible, can we really expect to hear the voice of God today like they did in the Bible? These believers may ask “Why can’t I hear from God?” Maybe they haven’t even thought about this much? It is often one of the things along with miracles that can make the world of the Bible and in particular the New Testament seem fictional, distant and other worldly, where the characters in it seem to clearly hear from God and yet this lies outside our experience. This will often be the case if we are just “waiting for something to happen to us”.

Many Christian books don’t deal with our direct relationship with our risen Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Books on guidance deal with it as if it was something separate from our life of prayer and communications with God. Many people who say they believe in Jesus do not believe that he continues to speak to us personally. They conduct their Christianity as a life in relationship with a Book, the Bible, and think God must not speak directly to people today because they think they don’t or can’t hear God this way. They are also confused about how reading the Bible relates to hearing from God and just what hearing God’s voice is like. Should we even expect God to speak to us today?

When Jesus said, “my sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27) believers like this might wrongly interpret it as meaning “If I can’t hear Jesus’ voice then I must not be his sheep?” But Jesus was referring to those who would follow him seeking him in prayer and learning how to listen to him. What they often mean by they can’t hear his voice, is that they don’t get a booming supernatural audible voice from the heavens (an explicit communication) or fall into trances (something that happens to them) or see visions or suddenly see angels or something that they can recognise as his voice in their mind (an explicit communication as something external that just happens to them) or have an impactful dream or vision that they recognise as being from him. We should make ourselves available and open to God to have these experiences if he chooses to speak to us this way. But we shouldn’t be too upset if we don’t have these experiences (John 20:29). For most genuine Christian believers, it seems they are not normative.

In relation to people who do claim to hear from God we sometimes hear off-putting stories of crackpots who say “God told me to do this” when it is clearly evident that either God did not tell them, they are crazy, or something worse. But rather than taking from this that it is not possible to hear God’s voice, what we need is a proper context and understanding of what it actually means to hear God’s voice and how to regard such claims. There are a number of issues around this and we should never just follow or automatically believe someone because they claim to hear God’s voice even if we think that we have evidence that this is actually the case. Neither should we dismiss people out of hand without making a genuine attempt to discern their claim. But we also need to establish and with his help to grow in our own ability to hear God’s voice as a vital and essential part of our own relationship with him. We also need to develop our criteria and knowledge of how to test what is from the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Another important point to address is spiritual pride or spiritual envy. If it is us who seem to hear from God, it can be that a door is opened for us to think that somehow makes us special or “a cut above the rest” spiritually. The fact is that God could use a brick to speak through. So, that God might bless you with the ability to hear his voice is no sign that you are somehow some spiritual superstar. Hopefully if we can both individually and corporately improve our ability to hear Jesus’ voice and the voice of his Father through the Holy Spirit we can dispense with this immature attitude to hearing from God.

The response to spiritual pride should be that we recognise in humility that it is only by God’s grace that anyone can hear from him. It should be viewed as both an individual and a corporate blessing to be able to truly hear from the Lord. We should have the boldness to believe that it can happen and we, both ourselves individually and collectively as a body of believers together can know the living voice of the living God and encounter him through his nature which is the Word of the Lord.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins and God has saved us. If we approach God with the right heart attitude, he can work in us and help us to get to a right place before him. If we feel we can’t hear from God, it makes us vulnerable when we see others who seem to hear from God. We might start to rely on them to hear from God rather than seeking the Lord directly for ourselves and to hear his voice ourselves. Of course it is something different to get the support of others to help verify that a message we are receiving is the voice of the Lord. Sincere collaboration in truth in this undertaking by believers is also a possibility and indeed trusted advisors are a blessing (Proverbs 11:14).

Spiritual envy is the result of seeing others who can apparently hear from God and responding by getting angry or feeling dejected about this because it is not something that we have yet experienced or that they feel God is somehow favouring others and ignoring them. This is the story of Cain who envied it that God received Abel’s sacrifice but spurned his. Also of Simon (Acts 8:19-22). However, we need to remember that God is goodness and light and in him there is no darkness (1John1:5). If we approach him the right way, which is through his Son Jesus (John 14:6) with the sincere and right motivation that is to serve him and know him as our Lord and master, he will receive us in his love and guide and help us on the way.

He promises “ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). God loves you and sees and treasures your efforts to get to know him when you come by his way and not your own with a right heart attitude. Not seeing him as some power you can exploit but as someone who can do his good work through you and realising your accountability to him.

Our rejoicing should be in that we can achieve clear communications with our Lord in a sincere, open and honest way. That we can verify a true and living message from a true and living saviour. When this happens we will have a church that truly knows the Lord and unbelievers and sceptics acknowledge their error and come to the Lord also.

Another point. Why bother to claim to hear God’s voice just to mislead people or to exercise selfish desires or worse to deceive others? If you are interested in those things, please do the world a favour and do not read on. No one wants to be misled in regard to these things. Clearly a context of understanding is needed to help us know our place in relation to our communications with God. To help us to have confidence and good and informed common sense and wisdom when it comes to determining if something we think we have received from God is actually from him or not. This is why we need to approach the whole issue of hearing from God with the caution and respect it deserves.

It is also really important that we as believers take a responsible attitude towards our communications with God. This just can’t be emphasised enough. If you want to serve Jesus it is important you do so honestly, sincerely and responsibly without intent to deceive yourself or others. You need to take steps to mitigate this and check that you can account for why you accept things as being from God. It is also really important to assume a position where you are not acting out of presumption.

Even if we were to hear a supernatural audible voice, this does not mean it is automatically from God. Discernment still needs to be applied. We know that Satan can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He also has an excellent knowledge of scripture (Luke 4:10). So even explicit communications with God need to be tested. Miraculous or supernatural experiences of the manifestation an audible voice do not have to always mean it is the Lord who is speaking (Galatians 1:8).

Furthermore, in relation to hearing voices, this is often associated with forms of mental illness. Many people can’t help hearing audible voices, but these voices inside their head are far from being the Holy Spirit. We should also consider the difference between hearing God’s voice and auditory hallucinations, hearing voices in general and mental health issues like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, psychosis etc. There is also a need to discern any kind of voice whatever its qualities. These things could happen in terms of an “episode” which might signal a mental health issue instead of a spiritual communication context.

A spiritual communication context.

So, having addressed these issues, we need to move to a spiritual communication context and how we can know Jesus and hear his voice and distinguish hearing from him with all the other stuff. We want the assurance that we can approach this issue in a safe and appropriate way that helps us to genuinely connect with and relate to the Lord. That is, if we wish to really hear from Jesus and expect him to guide our lives and help us towards his kingdom.

Another attitude these teachings aim to combat is ambivalence towards the subject. “I am quite content not to hear from God” is the thought, because “if I hear from God I might have to change”. Or, just not even trying to hear from God, the thought of the possibility not even being part of your consciousness. So it could be rooted in ignorance, it could be rooted in fear of repentance, fear of the unknown, contentedness with our current comfortable position, fear that God doesn’t have something better for us and the ignorance, that what we currently have is ok. There is also the lack of confidence that we will be able to have the ability to hear from God and the fear of the consequences of being wrong. If that is you, the first step in turning this ship is to ask God to help you to want to change and for you to start taking what steps you can in that direction. Caution is a wise approach but also balancing it through asking for God’s help to see through to the truth.

Hearing from God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said that when he went, he would send us another counsellor to be with us always. (John 14:16). That he would never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). And that he would not leave us as orphans (John 14:18). This counsellor is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who is with us and in us as believers (John 14:17). If we have received Jesus and committed ourselves to follow him then we can have faith that he is with us and in us, no matter how we think or feel about it at a particular time (2 Corinthians 4:7). We have a resurrected Jesus who did not stay in the grave. He is right here with each one of us as believers right now through his Holy Spirit. You can thank him for his presence with you here and now by acknowledging his presence in a prayer. This is also expressing your faith that you believe him in regards to this:

Thank you Jesus that you are with me here, right now. You are able to help me to hear your voice and it is only by your grace, mercy and forgiveness that I can hear from you, not by my own actions and not because of who I am, but because of who you are and what you have done.

The fact is that Jesus hasn’t just disappeared into Heaven never to be seen again. He is here with us by his Holy Spirit within us. He is always with us and in us (Ephesians 2:6) as believers by his Holy Spirit (Revelation 3:20). Sometimes we can sense his presence, even strongly, and other times we may not be able to, but he is still there. Pray for a personal revelation of our resurrected Jesus, that he is alive and present with you and indeed within you. He is the living God, not some god who is dead and you can only read about in a book.

How is this the case? Knowing our God.

Another important area is having a right God concept and understanding of who God is. Every Christian needs a practical understanding of the nature of our God. This is a correct understanding or conception of who God is. We call this understanding “the Trinity”. Put simply, God is not just a single person. The Bible reveals God who is one God, but three persons. The Father is God (John 8:54). Jesus the Son is God (John 8:58) and the Holy Spirit is God (1 Corinthians 12:13) but there are not 3 Gods but one. As the Shema states, “hear this Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). How can this be?

Well if we were to say God is 3 of one kind of thing and one of exactly the same kind of thing this would indeed make no sense. Fortunately, this is not what we are saying. God is not one person. God has 3 sources of personal expression within his being, whereas we only have one source of personal expression, one consciousness and mind in our being. Along with this we also have other parts of our being, like for example a body. God also has other parts of his being, like a resurrection body, but also the divine substance (substance that is God); that which is God-ness, the “stuff” which is God’s basis. This essence of God is what is shared by the 3 persons. To us this seems somewhat abstract and nebulous, but in the spiritual dimension it is something that is actual and real. This God-ness stuff, or substance is not abstract, relational or just conceptual either. It is a non-fiction thing; it is an actual something.

This is how John could say in the beginning of his gospel “in the beginning was the word” (Jesus the Son) “and the word was with God” (God the Father and God the Holy Spirit) “and the word was God” (the one God) (John 1:1). The three persons are of one substance, a single being, a single God. The persons are not the being of God, they are co-existent and of the one substance. Just as we don’t call just your mind or just your body a complete human being, neither do we call just the persons or just the substance God. God is the being that includes the substance and the persons. So, when we refer to God, as Jesus revealed him, we can be talking about God as being the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit or we could just be talking about one of the persons of God as being God. It is not correct to talk about the persons as being just part of God. That is because the fullness of the divine substance is in and connects each of the persons. However, at one point in time there was a relational separation between the persons of God. When Jesus was hanging on the cross the relationship between the persons of the Father and Holy Spirit was severed from the Son as Jesus bore the sin of humanity. Though Jesus was still fully God, he was relationally separated from the Father. God is pretty amazing.

We are pretty amazing too. Knowing Ourselves.

Unlike God, we only have one persona or source of personal expression, which is us. One source of personality, one self, made up of a subconscious and conscious mind. We are however more complex than we at first might realise. On one side we have our body which is the physical us that interfaces us with the physical universe and the world through our various senses like touch, sense of movement and orientation, taste, smell, sight and hearing. We might not be so aware that we are a unique kind of cross-over creature with part of us interfacing with another universe called the spiritual universe. Again, not a metaphor but an actual universe or another dimension, but quite different from the physical dimension we know through our bodies and senses.

This is the realm of God and angelic beings. The Bible calls this the “heavens” but we might refer to it equally as the spirit realm. The part of us that interfaces with this realm is the spirit part of our being. If you were to die tomorrow, this, along with your soul, is the “you” that others might know between your death and your resurrection. This part somehow bears your physical appearance in that realm and if others were to see you in that realm they would be able to recognise you (Luke 16:19-31) (Rev. 20:4) (2Cor5:8) (Ephesians 2:6).

Though this realm is depicted in horror movies delving into the “supernatural” it is actually real and it can be quite freaky for people who think they have never had any supernatural experiences to become aware of it. Though even the thought of this is quite scary and can seem very unusual if we have not really encountered it before. We have the assurance of our God who loves us that he can and does protect us.

The unusual nature of supernatural experiences can be quite confronting to us, when we are so used to the natural, rational and explainable way of life we most commonly experience. I remember being prayed for in a small Pentecostal assembly when I was quite a young Christian, and having the experience of sensing these dark presences moving away to the left and then being filled with a physical sensation like intense pins and needles but that surged through my body and limbs. This experience of the supernatural was a very unusual and freaky experience. It was shortly after this that I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the ability to pray in tongues.

More than this, Paul reveals and for those who pray in tongues their experience is that when we pray in tongues the spirit part of our being is involved in praying but the mind is unfruitful (1 Corinthians 14:14). While we are embodied we are mostly not aware of the spirit realm except by inference or indirectly. We may become aware of it through tangible physiological or sensory like experiences of the Holy Spirit.

A further link to the spirit part of our being is revealed by Paul in Romans 8:16 in the Bible. The Holy Spirit who is within us joins with our spirit to affirm to us that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). Mostly this is an inward knowing and reassurance. When we reflect on whether we are God's children we get a prompting or internal knowing that this is the case. It "rings true" that we know in an assured way that we are God's children. It is not true that this is always the case. Sometimes if God doesn't seem very close it can easily seem like we are not God's children or that he has abandoned us, however this is just a lie of the enemy as God through the Holy Spirit has promised us that he will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). We learn that our feelings at any particular time do not change the absolute truths of God's word revealed in the Bible.

Activities of our mind. Understanding our soul.

Then there is that part of you which is your mind, persona or soul in a more limited sense both the sub-conscious and conscious, thoughtful, feeling you with your memories of your experiences and life. Also the acting and expressive you that does things.

Obviously, we know the world around us by means of our consciousness or awareness applied to our senses. We can also apply our consciousness to images, our imagination or ability to re-experience things and recall experiences from memory. We can actively and creatively transform those sensory memories by imagining things that we have never seen, say a purple giraffe with yellow spots. This ability to simulate our sensory experience inside our minds is an important mental capacity. Sometimes our thoughts can be like doing things in a virtual reality, so lifelike they can be like doing those things, like when we dream or daydream.

At other times it can be like we are removed, looking at a visual sequence of action, like a film running in our minds. We can recall or create static pictures that aren't moving too. We can imagine hearing different sounds like a violin playing twinkle twinkle little star or a flute playing Mary had a little lamb. We can think in words as well by saying inside our heads rather than out loud something like "the cat sat on the mat". Sometimes our minds can be so revved up we find it difficult to control our internal agitation and self-talk. This is our mind's voice where we put our thoughts into words and become aware of them.

How aware are you of what it is like to experience your own thoughts? Your "self-talk" and your "imaginings"? Are you good at picturing things in a lifelike way or do you find this difficult? One issue is that it can be difficult for us to visually imagine things as though we are seeing them or to visualise if we are overly oriented towards our sense of sight. One will clash with the other. Being able to switch into paying attention to our visual imagery is a skill we can develop. It is this fully attending in an immersive way that allows us to visualise in a lifelike way.

Natural Abilities but Spiritual implications.

As Christians we also need to be aware of the spiritual aspect of the use of our minds. Occult practices also try to make use of visualisation or picturing things and this is something we need to be aware of. Be very wary if you hear people talking about “energies” and “bringing things into being” through visualising them. This is very different from taking things to Jesus or God the Father through the Holy Spirit or having him attend us in the anointing through faith by praying or asking God for things.

These occult practices also talk about emptying our minds and usually they talk about clearing our minds of everything. This is very different from stilling our minds and asking Jesus to come into our minds and fill our minds with his presence by his Holy Spirit and to minister to us.

Our Subconscious Mind.

Most of the time we are only indirectly aware of our subconscious mind’s activity. Our subconscious mind is the part of us responsible for regulating body temperature, telling us we are hungry or that we need to go to the toilet. Sometimes we lapse into automatic behaviour and later realise we have not been aware of what we were just doing, because we were doing it automatically. Consciousness lapses out and we go on “autopilot”. These experiences should easily convince us that we are more than just our conscious experiences and our mind is more than just that part of us which is conscious and alert, experiencing what we are seeing, hearing or feeling at any particular moment in time.

Our subconscious mind is driven by our survival instinct and our natural drives. Our natural desire to preserve our safety, look after ourselves and not get killed by doing stupid things. In short it is on our side. For example, if our conscious mind has become disengaged while driving a car, our subconscious will cause us to become aware if something happens. Something that requires us to be conscious again occurs and we will awake from conscious dormancy and almost in an instant become conscious of what we need to monitor and respond to. This happens sometimes with driving or when we catch ourselves doing things automatically because we can’t remember what we have just been doing. Another example is falling asleep and allowing that to happen. Trying to be conscious of falling asleep is a recipe for insomnia. Psychologists are aware of a range of processes that happen automatically that involve our mental functioning. Some arrive as signals or feelings in our conscious mind. In fact, there is a continuous and active interplay between our conscious mind and subconscious mind. It is also an important part of our state while we are sleeping, processing our experiences and exploring our ideas in dreams.

A couple of theological points on our subconscious mind are that the spirit part of our being is connected with it. That if the Holy Spirit dwells in us he is also in our subconscious mind and communicates with us through our spirit. A need we have is to discern our own internal mental life and what is happening in it. When we have an idea or thought it would have content, that is like “the cat sat on the mat” or a verbal thought (a thought made of internalised words), it may also have accompanying feeling states.

As I have just alluded there is also that “transition zone”, the fringe or periphery of consciousness which is the boundary between the subconscious and the conscious mind. There is also the issue of how the spirit part of our being relates to our subconscious mind and processes. But it is this place where thoughts that pop into our mind emerge. If something comes to mind, we become aware of it.

How do all these parts of who we are relate to our hearing from God? Hearing from God can be something that takes place inside our minds, and initially like the prophet Samuel we need the skills to recognise when it happens. Furthermore, we need the skill to identify and respond to him.

Having explored ourselves a little, we now need to have a look at the spiritual communication context in terms of our spiritual preparation to hear from the Lord and some of the attitudes and things we need to take care of to put ourselves in a position where we can hear him. We need to understand the idea of a “disciple position” and also understand what it means to be “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10) (Romans 8:9). That is, to engage with the Lord (Luke 10:27).

Cleaning out the cupboard and getting ourselves into a position where we can hear his voice.

Another precondition for hearing from God, along with our salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit is our unconditional forgiveness of anyone who has wronged us (Matthew 6:15). We must really clean out the cupboard in this regard and for many people this is no easy task. But we have been forgiven much ourselves and it does not benefit us to hold onto unforgiveness. Repentance from unforgiveness involves handing our pain of being wronged and our desire for revenge over to God and trusting in his goodness and recognising our position before him. We need to realise that God fully deserves his revenge against us for breaking his laws and more so since he is a just and holy God, but through Jesus he has made a way for us to be forgiven.

If we truly recognise how much holding onto unforgiveness hurts us and does not get us the justice and healing we desire, we would not do it. Often what is hardest to deal with is the hurt we have experienced, the feeling of being let down, the feeling of being hurt, wronged and treaded badly, or the unfairness of a situation. However big our hurt is, however hard it is to let go, we need to realise that God wants it to drive us to him and not away from him. If you have been hurt badly and find this almost impossible, can I suggest that you invite the Holy Spirit to minister his love, peace and healing to you and to come and help you deal with this hurt and anger. In your mind bring it to the foot of the cross, lay it down and ask Jesus to take it. Not just at that point in time, but every time you struggle with those feelings. After that, every time it bugs you, return again to Jesus and ask for his help to deal with it.

Also, it is important that you orient yourself to see Jesus who was no stranger to rejection, hurt and anger (Hebrews 4:15). Continually place yourself under the Ministry of the Holy Spirit by asking him to minister to you and to deal with this hurt and pain within you and expect that it might take time, but through willingness to recognise the problem and preparedness to take small steps in this direction is a good start. Our pain is the consequence of a world fallen in sin and rebellion. It is important that we see things rightly and that God only allows this because of his love for us and that we may eventually appreciate and share in his love.

We need to trust the Lord to deal with these situations and hand our anger and sense of being wronged over to him (Romans 12:19). This is the case especially where we can't see how or why God could have let this happen to us. The truth is that the things that happen in our lives don't always happen because God wants us to suffer or to go through them. Did the Father want to put Jesus through the experiences of the cross? The answer is no, but because of his love for us he knew it was required. But we can also take comfort that these things also always happen with an eventual good purpose or intent in terms of God's actions, especially we should remember this when we can't see how this could be so (Romans 8:28). How could it be otherwise? Our God is good (1 John 1:5). When we are in a dark place of pain, we share with our saviour who went there far worse and knows this place well (Philippians 3:10). We should also try to remember that we are not greater than Jesus, God's only son and if he was not spared suffering, we should not presume that we will be either (John 15:13). This is written to you of his children as a reminder and to console you. When we go through these things we also need to recognise that we are not alone. Our saviour who is with us and within us is suffering along with us, right next to us. If we wrong others, he is also in them and we are wronging him also.

Rebellion and lack of repentance.

This is a thorny one, and over against it is our reliance on God's grace in dealing with us. As Christians we all have to grow under the Lord to cast off our old lives and our sinful nature with its propensity for sin and rebellion, pushing to give up those sins and things we know are wrong before the Lord but that we struggle with due to our rebelliousness. We need to develop resilience in establishing our orientation and determination to get back up if we fall and resume our race, to turn and turn, again and again back to the Lord and set and establish our resoluteness in departing from poor choices and bad behaviour. Even where our behaviours feel like habits and we just don't know how to deal with them or ourselves, we should patiently hand them over to God who knows us better than we know ourselves and turn again with resolution to follow Jesus (Hebrews 12:1).

This is an important part of taking up our own cross daily and following Jesus. We need to recognise that the enemy can get into our mind when our thought life focuses down on us. There is a healthy place where we need to recognise our own needs and to have those needs met, but that we also need to consider others and the Lord. We need to keep our eye on being the person we know Jesus wants us to be and reflect on where we are missing it.

Our attitudes and actions can cloud our communications with the Lord and disorient our spiritual compass. Our rebellion is a real enemy in terms of the undertaking of learning to hear from the Lord. It is a shocking impediment and were it not for God's grace we could never know him. We also need to watch out for the lies and deceptions of the enemy as he appeals to our self-interests and desires to lure us into the trap.

We also need to not beat up on ourselves where we fail but to turn again with growing resilience and purpose ourselves towards our master and saviour (Hebrews 12:1) (Hebrews 12:4) (2 Timothy 2:19). In this we should put on encouragement, resilience and perseverance against the enemy's darts of discouragement, condemnation and put downs and apathy, that we not become disheartened. If we remain true and stay the course, God will not reject us. We should continually surrender ourselves to him, acknowledge his actual Lordship and affirm his Lordship over our lives and set ourselves again to pursue him and what he has for us.

The Spiritual context for hearing from God – It is part of our relationship with him.

This might seem obvious, but it is important we don't overlook it. The core of hearing from God is recognising that it is something that is done as part of a growing and developing relationship with him. Given this, it is straightforward that we need to orient ourselves to hear from him. We do this by taking up a discipleship position before him. To sit before our rabbi, our risen Jesus, and seek instruction from him. Recognising who he is, what his purposes and interests are, recognising our own needs before him. This is the essence of how Jesus taught us to pray.

Jesus modelled a relationship with God where we come to God as a parent. That we recognise the Father. The Lord's prayer starts with "our father." and that we are like the child (Matthew 18:3). Recognising our limitation and dependency and our limited knowledge, but his ability and capability and love and care for us to look after us.

It should be a simple relationship, not like that outlined in the Old Testament with the need for complicated sacrifices and ritual before the Lord could be heard. We have a great High Priest who has opened this way for us (Hebrews 10:19). We can through God's grace address the Father as "our Father God in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).

But at the same time, we still need to recognise our parent in a respectful way and that he is both perfect and holy. That we have to enter the temple of God in the heavens as a priest through Jesus sprinkled blood cleansing us and making a way for us into the holy of holies where we, through God's grace can with the utmost respect converse with a holy God. It is a right attitude to reverence God. We do this by recognising his amazing otherness. His Holiness and specialness. That the God of all the universe created us as human beings and wants us to know him. But, in the Old Testament it was rightly recognised that no one could look on the Lord and live. The utter terror of what holiness is for sinful human beings needs to be recognised. Through God's grace in Jesus our saviour we are spared from the wrath of the Lord and can approach the Lord without fear but maintaining reverence and utmost respect.

As our teacher we need to recognise our need to hear his voice and be wise and skilful at discerning it. Concerning this we should indeed pray for wisdom (James 1:5) (Matthew 10:16). What is it within us that allows us to discern the voice of our master? What realisations and understandings need to accompany this? How do we recognise his voice? The Holy Spirit also drew to me this analogy:

The sheep does it by getting to know their master's call, it can listen for the direction and know where the master is so it can draw near to him. In as much as we are able to, we need to get into his headspace and heart space and share his mindset, recognise and see and share in his goals, intentions and outlook. We will then know where he is and what is happening. This again is only something that can happen by his grace and sometimes we won't be able to see or share in this. It is important that we also recognise this possibility.

If this is the way we think it is, it is important to entrust the situation to the Lord and rely on his ability to guide us and determine the things and people around us to help us to find the way in his will. Key here is as the scripture says to acknowledge him and keep seeking him to guide us and to have grace to recognise his light on our path. To continue to look to what we know of him. There are times when we may need the master to find us.

But we can also hear from him in our thought life. This requires our learning to allow him to do this, and what this means is really important for us to unpack. We are not just listening for any voice. We are learning to discern and listen for his voice and distinguish it from all the other stuff. The first thing to learn is that the voice of the Lord can be subtle and difficult to discern. One of our important skill sets, just like it is for the sheep to learn to listen for the voice or call of the shepherd, so we must learn to listen for and hear the voice of our master. We must look around to see where our master is and what he has to say. We must learn how to recognise and listen for his voice.

Come to me, learn to hear my voice says the Lord, for I will bring you peace and wisdom when you remain close to me. Run to me and be safe within me and within my will. I have a place in green pastures to lead you and I would have you wander away from the briars and barren places and be on the green pastures with me. Take your load and burdens, cast them on me and come and meet me and I will be with you and help you in your life.

See if you can discern that this is the voice of the Lord. This word sprang at my mind while writing this. More properly this kind of word is a prophecy. It isn't predicting the future but it is the Lord speaking a word directly to you or others as a believer for your instruction, encouragement and it is a word to build you up and encourage you to follow him.

The Lord wants us to have confidence that we can seek him, and we can hear from him. Notice the threads of meaning the Holy Spirit drew into my mind. The references to psalm 23 that the Holy Spirit drew me to. I didn't start out thinking about that scripture, but the Holy Spirit quickly drew my mind to it and put pictures into my mind of the dry and barren places and the green pastures with himself standing there inviting me. This is the place of hearing from the Lord. This is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is how you can tell that it is he who is speaking to you.

It was more like a thought than a vision, this shows his heart as the loving God who wants you to be with him and in his love. The ideas formed in my mind as I stopped what I was writing and recognised his voice there in my mind and started out with words which he took and developed and really “took over” as he guided my mind. The prompting feeling that I recognise as being the Lord wanting to speak to me. A sense of urgency and excitement that rose along with the thoughts. That on this occasion I have allowed him to speak to me and I am learning to be open and available to hear his voice.

How do I know it wasn't just a creative voice out of my own head? What is my basis for determining that this was from beyond just me? That it is anointed and a genuine word from a living saviour? You need to have that little bit of boldness to believe that God cares about you enough to want to speak to you. Know this, that there is nothing more certain in this universe than that this is the case. If you can have this boldness, take this faith and trust in the living God, he will make his way to reveal himself to you.

In making my determination I considered how it aligns with what I know of Jesus. It bears the stamp of his authority in the way it was conveyed to me. It aligned with the words of the Bible and brought them to life. It aligns with his teaching and the scriptures and sound doctrine and his personality as I know him from the Bible. It came alive to me and imparted his life into me. I could feel what I know and recognise as his presence when it happened, I could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is just SO my Jesus. There is a “self-evident” aspect to it. It aligns with that I should expect the real Jesus of the Bible to talk to me, since I have put myself before him and asked him to speak with me. It was encouraging and comforting and drew my attention to him (Luke 11:18). So from the Jesus of the Bible it should be evident that I as someone coming to learn from him and hear from him should be able to expect a genuine response. With these criteria considered I judge that it was a real and legitimate and perfect and divine word from my Jesus to me. Just as inspired and scriptural as the scriptures of the Bible.

This is what revelation from the Lord is like, as he draws threads of meaning and scriptures together, creating an experience of realisation within us. These are hallmarks that recommend what we have received as being from God by the Holy Spirit. That we have been “in the Spirit” in listening for the voice of the Lord and in the flow of the anointing. This is the place we should want to grow in as the disciples of the Lord. This does not just apply to wonderful edifying thoughts or realisations or connections with the Lord like in the word that I gave above, but receiving other things like words of knowledge and wisdom and also predictive words about the future as the Lord shares them with us.

Of course, it seems easier and less consequential to us to verify and accept that this is a word of the Lord to our human minds since it is so close to a known scripture and is not conveying extra information or some knowledge of the future. It is indeed close to the vine and not out on a limb. The nature of the process of verifying those kinds of words also needs to be unpacked. In God however it is just the same. We need more caution and verification to apply in discerning a voice that wants to tell us to do something, or to tell us what to believe about something, or give us an understanding of a future event as there are greater consequences connected with these. Therefore, in terms of the doorway to hearing from the Lord, it makes sense to start with hearing the Lord's voice in encouraging and building us up in him and slowly and cautiously consider different kinds of words and establishing the kinds of criteria for verifying if they are from the Lord.

We do have no need that any should teach us, but we should make a cautious pathway when hearing the Lord in regards to what to believe or understand or hearing instructions or about future events. It is also appropriate and safer where possible to start out in those things in collaboration with other likeminded believers in hearing the voice of the Lord where we can perform the ministry of verification where the Lord shows more than one of us so we get to know his voice in sharing these things with us. To get to know what it is and means to move in the anointing of the Holy Spirit by faith. Asking another to help us confirm what the Lord is saying before we esteem what we think we have got as being from the Lord. However, we must always be careful in accepting the advice of others, as we also need to discern this. It does not change our own responsibility to discern what the Lord is saying to us individually. We should also evaluate the advice of others carefully and also use tools like seeking confirmation from the Lord where we need to by appropriate means.

**Ask and it shall be given, Seek and you will find, Knock and the door will be open.
(Matthew 7:7)**

The first way to go with this is to talk to God, ask for and **expect a response**. Have you ever expected something? You anticipated that it was going to happen and looked forward to it. This is how you need to be with your prayer and talking to God. Anticipate that he will answer you. You might not know how, you might not know when he will answer you, but be expecting it to happen. To express your faith, you can also thank God that you believe he is both able to and willing to speak to you and that you are able to hear his voice.

Thank you Jesus, that it is not too difficult for you to talk to me by your Holy Spirit. That you are able to help me to discern and hear your voice and recognise that it is you who is speaking to me and not something or someone else. Right now, I choose to expect that you will speak to me and help me to know how to recognise that it is you who is speaking to me. Thank you Jesus that you will guide me to learn to listen to and recognise your voice through the Holy Spirit.

This is expressing your faith in relation to something. You have this positive and active anticipation about it. You express that faith by praying faithfully in regard to it referring to the scriptures on which you base your hope. Can you believe it might be possible that God would speak to you? Don't you think that as his child, he wants you to hear his voice? Do you know that the God of all the universe is well able to allow you as one of his creations to hear his voice?

Prayer is also putting yourself in a place to speak to and hear from the Lord. That is just talking to God as being real just like you would talk with a friend, but you just can't see God. That doesn't mean that you can't sense his presence though. Sometimes sensing his presence just happens as a result of your turning your mind to the Lord and praying. You don't have to speak out loud when you pray as God knows your thoughts, however it is a good thing to voice your prayers and say them out loud.

Another note, others might mistake this as making Jesus into your "imaginary friend", though the context of linking what you receive to the Jesus of the Bible should put pay to any concerns you have about this. The living God is a very real spiritual entity, indeed the creator entity. This teaching is about connecting with this God. Jesus was no imaginary person and this teaching follows on and bears witness to his teaching. Its claim is that just as he taught in the Bible, humans can know him in their life and follow him. Without this Christianity is a mere husk and void. God willing, some may even read this teaching and recognise God speaking to them through it.